

IN THE CLAIMS:

The claims are reproduced below for the Examiner's convenience.

1. (Original) An image heating apparatus for heating an image formed on a recording material, comprising:

a heater;

a supporting member for supporting said heater;

a flexible rotatable member rotating with contacting with said heater; and

a backup member contacting said rotatable member;

wherein the recording material passes between said rotatable member and said backup member, and

wherein upstream of said heater of said supporting member with respect to the direction of movement of the recording material, there are provided a protruding portion protruding more toward said backup member side than the surface of contact of said heater with said rotatable member, and a groove portion provided between said protruding portion and said heater and depressed more than the surface of contact of said heater with said rotatable member, and a lubricant is contained in said groove portion.

2. (Original) An image heating apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein an area of contact between said rotatable member and said backup member in the direction of movement of the recording material is greater than the width of said heater.

3. (Original) An image heating apparatus according to Claim 2, wherein in the direction of movement of the recording material, at least a portion of the groove portion is within the area of contact between said rotatable member and said backup member.

4. (Original) An image heating apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the depth of the groove portion is 0 mm or greater and 0.4 mm or less, and the width of the groove portion in the direction of movement of the recording material is five times as great as the depth of the groove portion or greater.

5. (Original) An image heating apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein the bottom surface portion of the groove portion is formed of a material higher in coefficient of thermal expansion than said supporting member.